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Country note**

Gabon

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for Gabon for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002-2006.

The situation of children and women

1. Gabon, a mainland country in the Gulf of Guinea covering 267,667 square kilometres, has 1.2 million inhabitants, 73 per cent of whom live in urban areas (general census of population and housing, 1993); 15 per cent of the population is of foreign origin. The country has been at peace since achieving independence and has contributed to subregional conflict resolution efforts. The State's revenue comes primarily from petroleum exploitation and timber, which account for a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of $4,630. In terms of the human development index, however, in 1999, Gabon ranked only 123 (out of the 174 countries categorized), thus displaying the widest gap in the world between adjusted per capita GDP and HDI (-60). This paradox can be explained by: the unequal distribution of income (83 per cent of the population live on an income that is below the minimum wage and more than 20 per cent of the urban population survive on less than one dollar per day), the low level of social spending, as well as the high level of indebtedness. Debt servicing accounted for 55 per cent of public resources in 1994, compared to

* E/ICEF/2001/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

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77.5 per cent in 1998. Meanwhile, over the past decade or so, the social welfare system has been eroded and access to basic social services has diminished; more than 70 per cent of poor urban households live in slums.

2. Monitoring of the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is under way, and the country's initial report has been submitted to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. However, analysis of the situation of children and women is difficult because statistical information is either lacking or of poor quality. Gabon is currently conducting its first-ever population and health survey, which will supplement and update certain national data.

3. The infant and under-five mortality rates are currently estimated at 85 and 144 per 1,000 live births respectively, with a maternal mortality rate of 500 per 100,000 live births. This situation is mainly due to the decline in the availability and quality of basic social services. The rates of vaccination coverage for diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (triple doses), for example, fell from 53 per cent in the early 1990s to 30 per cent in 1999. Available statistics on nutrition reveal low reliance on breast-feeding in the first four months (15 per cent) and a high incidence of anaemia among pregnant women (71 per cent).

4. Gabon has made significant progress in broadening access to primary education, with a net school enrolment rate of 86.3 per cent and no gender-based disparities. That success is attenuated, however, by the poor quality of the education system characterized by high repetition rates (approximately one third at the primary level) and low internal performance. Furthermore, less than 20 per cent of children have access to pre-school education facilities.

5. HIV/AIDS seroprevalence is increasing sharply. In 1995, an estimated 2.9 per cent of the population between 15 and 49 years of age were infected; in 1999, the rate had reached 6.5 per cent (national AIDS control programme). In 1996, HIV/AIDS seroprevalence among pregnant women was estimated at 4 per cent; in 1999, the total number of orphans was reported to have risen to 8,600.

6. The number of children in need of special protection measures is also increasing as a result of growing urbanization and entrenched poverty and also because of the country's attractiveness in the subregional context. Children identified as falling in that category mainly include victims of trafficking for the purposes of child labour (at least one thousand) and street children. The Libreville meeting (February 2000) highlighted the subregional character of trafficking problem, as well as the need for coordinated action by countries involved. Furthermore, refugee influxes from the Congo included some 4,500 children.

7. An analysis of disaggregated data available points to the persistence of significant gender-based disparities, particularly as regards illiteracy, access to secondary and higher education and participation in decision-making. Customary laws continue to play a prominent role in determining the status of women. By contrast, modern laws — more favourable to women's rights — are insufficiently applied. However, the Government has taken legislative measures in order to remedy the situation. A major problem affecting girls is the large number of teenage pregnancies and of abortions performed in poor sanitary conditions (approximately 50 per cent of girls under the age of 19 have had an abortion).

8. The advent of a multiparty system in 1990 led to an expansion of civil society, with the establishment of many non-governmental organizations (NGOs). However,

the operational capacity of most organizations and associations continues, on the whole, to be limited.

Lessons learned from recent programme experience

9. The mid-term review of the current programme recommended that programme activities should give more attention to a rights-based approach. In view of the inadequacy of basic social services, it was agreed that a balance should be maintained between advocacy activities concerning the implementation of rights, on the one hand, and direct programme support for strengthening basic social services and national capacities, on the other hand.

10. Since the establishment of the UNICEF Office in Libreville in 1993, several lessons have been drawn from programme experience, namely: (a) the importance of targeting activities more closely to improve efficiency and ensure that they are better adapted to the limited resources available to the programme; (b) the value added resulting from the strengthening of coordination mechanisms between Government departments, as demonstrated by the success of the national workshop on the follow-up to the 20/20 initiative; (c) the importance of setting legislative, political or other preconditions to the implementation of certain activities, in order to improve feasibility and sustainability (such as the implementation of the Bamako Initiative); and (d) the importance of establishing new partnerships with civil society in order to strengthen and improve responses to problems affecting children and women.

Proposed country programme strategy

11. The country programme for the period 2002-2006 falls within the scope of the basic cooperation agreement signed this year. It is based, on the one hand, on the Government's national policies and priorities for action — including the Gabon 2025 strategic appraisal, the Government's policy statement and sectoral legislation on strategic directions — and, on the other hand, on the strategic directions of UNICEF — including the medium-term plan and the new agenda for children. The finalized programme will also reap the results of processes already under way, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the results of the population and health survey.

12. The programme aims to support national efforts to realize the rights of children and women in accordance with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. These general objectives will help to reduce the infant, under-five and maternal mortality rates; ensure harmonious physical and mental development and quality education for all children; and provide protection to — and reduce the number of — children in especially difficult circumstances.

13. The proposed programme will favour the continuity of certain key activities of the current programme, namely: monitoring of implementation of the Conventions, follow-up to the 20/20 Initiative, elaboration of strategies to combat trafficking in children, strengthening of basic social services, and eradication of poliomyelitis. At the same time, the programme will address certain emerging priorities pertinent to

Gabon, such as the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the specific problems of adolescents and young people. The programme will also promote the adoption of an integrated approach to young children, which would simultaneously take account of their survival, development and protection: dimensions vital to their personal development.

14. The cooperation programme will sustain certain activities at the national and local levels by ensuring maximum possible convergence and synergy. The existing partnership and complementarity with activities carried out by the various donors will be strengthened. New alliances will be formed, especially with NGOs and also, where appropriate, with other countries in the subregion (in order, for example, to ensure a concerted response to certain problems of a regional character, such as trafficking in children).

15. The cooperation programme will be based on four main strategies: advocacy so as to promote implementation of the two Conventions, strengthen alliances and partnership and encourage better utilization of national resources; national, decentralized and local capacity-building; provision of basic, quality services, with special attention to access to services for the most vulnerable groups; and strengthening of the capacity of civil society so as to promote greater community participation. It will consist of two programmes.

16. An *integrated programme of action in the urban context* will be elaborated in a delimited urban and peri-urban zone. Within that zone, the programme will seek to reduce infant and under-five mortality and morbidity and enhance the psychosocial development of young children using an integrated care package for early childhood survival and development. The programme will also help to prepare children and adolescents for life and contribute to the prevention of HIV/AIDS infection, including through the development of communication activities within the school environment for promoting behavioural change. The programme will also accord particular attention to the strengthening of follow-up, as well as to the assessment of the impact and cost of activities with a view to contributing towards the creation of sustainable development models for replication in other urban contexts.

17. The purpose of the *social policies advocacy and development programme* is to support national efforts in respect of the adoption, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of social policies and the promotion of reforms to benefit children and women. The programme will also seek to enhance the success of the country programme as a whole, support the elaboration of a national policy on children and continue to support the follow-up to the 20/20 Initiative and the implementation of the national plan of action. A large part of the programme will be devoted to the provision of support for the monitoring of conventions and of the country's international commitments, including implementation of the two Conventions, elaboration of strategies to combat trafficking in children in line with poverty eradication efforts and attainment of the goal of eradicating poliomyelitis.

18. The cross-sectoral costs will help cover certain staff and operational costs, as well as the initial phase of emergency response. It should also be noted that, in accordance with the provisions of the operational framework, the Government makes a direct annual contribution to the country programme, the precise utilization of which will be determined during finalization of the programme.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2000-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	*Supplementary funds*	*Total*
Action in the urban context	1 400	1 300	2 700
Social policies advocacy and development	600	1 140	1 740
Cross-sectoral costs	1 100	560	1 660
Total	**3 100**	**3 000**	**6 100**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.